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CONTRIBUTIONS

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Number 3

EIGHT TARASCAN LEGENDS

Maurice Boyd

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Gainesville

1958

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PREFACE

The Florida State Museum's field of interest includes the greater Caribbean area. It is appropriate that the first non-archaeological issue of the *Contributions, Social Sciences*, should pertain to Mexico, our sister republic to the south; should refer to the interesting but much neglected Tarascan Indians; should be prepared by Maurice Boyd, Associate Professor of Social Sciences at the University of Florida; and should be based on field work done by him while a visiting professor at the University of Michoacán in Mexico.

The Tarascans are relatively unknown in comparison with the Aztecs. They are covered by single line references or, at most, a paragraph in books written in English which deal with the history of Mexico. Yet these people were nearly the equals of the Aztecs both in military strength and cultural attainments. It is primarily an accident of geography which gave the Aztecs the greater prominence. 101 114

Dr. Boyd has made a special study of the Tarascans—their life, their history, and their culture. We are glad to present the first results of this research. 114

Ripley P. Bullen
Curator of Social Sciences

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INTRODUCTION

Prehistoric Tarascans, residing for centuries in the lake country of Michoacán, Mexico, asked questions about things around them. They asked why the land was sometimes flat, sometimes hilly, sometimes rich, and sometimes poor. They wanted to know why the precious waters of a spring suddenly erupted from beneath a tree on the hillside. They felt that the wonderful light-giving sun, the hurrying stream, the glittering stars, and the rustling leaves all required explanation.

Before the Spanish Conquest, the oral accounts of the *Petamuti* (high priest) explained the phenomena of nature through the great deeds of Tarascan gods and culture heroes. Knowledge of historical events was similarily preserved.

Some of these stories, to which Catholic and modern elements have been added, are still "history" to the native Tarascans living in isolated pueblos in the mountains. As with many people, it is what the Tarascans believe to be the historical truth, rather than the actual history itself, which most profoundly influences their thoughts and actions.

BACKGROUND OF THE LEGENDS

The Tarascan area has contracted since the time of the Spanish Conquest. Located approximately 250 miles northwest of Mexico City in the State of Michoacán, it centers in several geographic areas which form a fairly continuous block.

In the area around Zacapu (Fig. 1), traditional point of origin of the Tarascan dynasty, remain a few purely Tarascan villages. Bordering the Mexico City-Guadalajara highway a few miles northwest of Zacapu is a small, pleasant valley approximately a mile wide and six miles long. It is called La Cañada and in it nestle ten of the Once Pueblos of pre-Conquest days.

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ten of the *Once Pueblos* of pre-Conquest days.

South of La Cañada stretches an elevated area of high mountains which cradle wide and fertile valleys. This is the fabled La Sierra country.

East of La Sierra the land falls away to the lower elevation of the lake country which includes the basins of Lake Cuitzeo and Lake Pátzcuaro. The latter, horseshoe in shape with the curve at the west and the two prongs to the east, has its northern and western shores dotted with Tarascan villages. Within the fastness of the lake lie three important Tarascan islands: Janitzio, an astonishingly enormous rock rising high above the blue expanse, with its picturesque fishing village clinging to one side; Jarácuaro, wide and flat, with its village of hat weavers; and La Pacanda, high and flat, with its farms sitting up above the water's edge.

These areas form the solid nucleus of the Tarascan country, whose people, with surprising vigor, resist outside influences threatening to destroy their traditional way of life.

This is a hilly country with conifers on the highest slopes. The lower hills are starred in the summer rainy season with bright red, clear yellow, and delicate violet wildflowers. Michoacán does not become drab even in the dry season, but rather takes on the colors of old tapestries. Its soil is reddish or saffron, its houses dusty white to deep gray, its roofs brownish red, and its lakes azure blue.

Into this area came the ancestors of the Tarascans sometime between the seventh and twelfth centuries of our era. The German scholar Seler (1908, p. 33), in his interpretation of a questionable sixteenth-century codex called the "Lienzo de Jucutacato," argues that they entered the region in the seventh century, but archaeological evidence does not seem to support such an early date. Certainly by the twelfth century they were located in the Lake Pátzcuaro region, in Zacapu, and in La Sierra at Patamban and Tarecuato (Fig. 1).

In olden days the Tarascans were fierce fighters who, over a period of time, forged an empire which successfully repulsed attacks by Aztec armies. It was their hatred of the Aztecs that

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INTRODUCTION

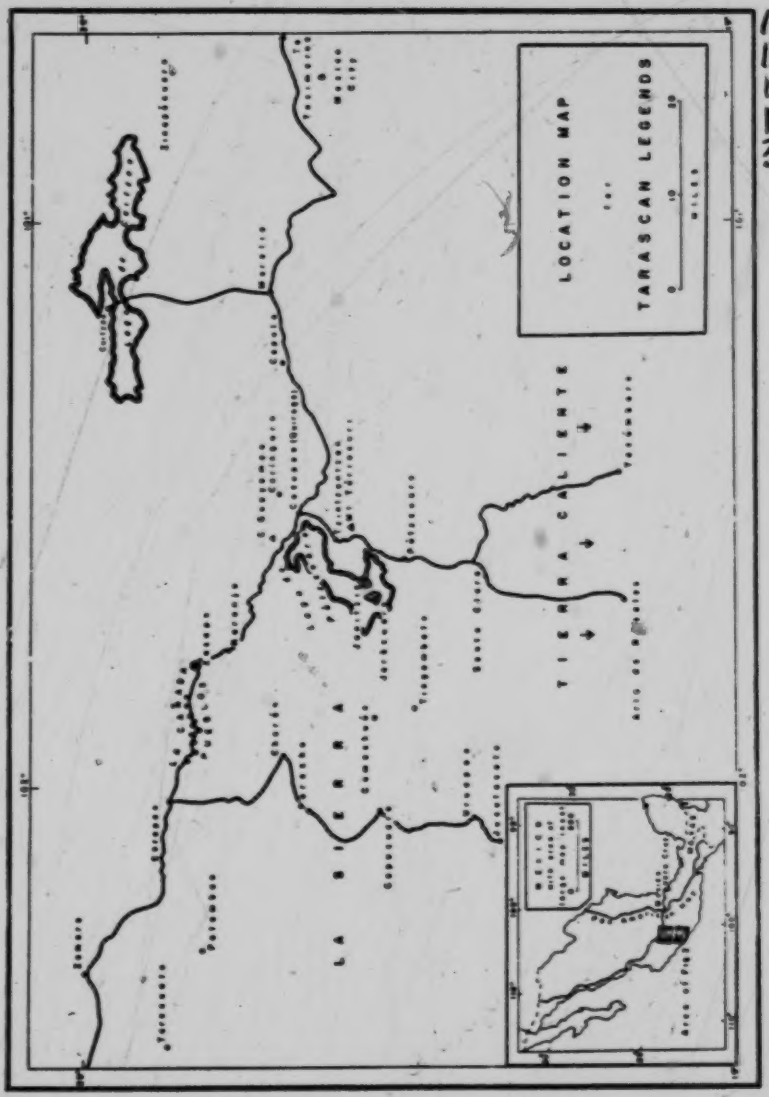

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Fig. 1. Map of the Tarascan Area.

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prevented the Tarascans from helping Montezuma when he sought additional support against Cortez. Consequently, the Spaniards were able to conquer the Aztec and Tarascan empires separately.

In the legends will be found specific references to some of these historic events and to places located on the accompanying maps (Figs. 1-2). These tales explain some of the natural features of the Tarascan countryside. Frequently, political history is combined with natural history.

Except for references to the four cardinal directions in the first legend and to omens and dreams predicting the coming of the Spaniards in the last two tales, there is no similarity between these Tarascan legends and those of other Indian groups of Mexico.

COLLECTION OF THE LEGENDS

The Tarascan legends and folk tales presented in this paper are a select few of those secured in 1953 by the author and his wife while he was Visiting Professor of History at the University of Michoacán in Morelia, Mexico. They were collected in the villages of Indians who still use the pre-Conquest language and speak of themselves as *Purépecha* rather than as Tarascans.

The etymology of the word "Tarascan" is disputed. The traditional explanation, probably correct, is that the conquistadores took Indian women as wives or concubines and were called *Tarascué* (son-in-law) by the fathers of the girls. Thinking that the term was the name of the tribe, the Spaniards referred to all as *Tarascos* (Foster, 1948, p. 9).

The legend of creation was told in the barrio of Santa Maria in Morelia by Ignacia Peña, a full-blooded Tarascan *serviente* (housemaid) with a third-grade education; the story of the tribal journey to Michoacán was given in Copula by Luis Espinosa, a meztizo with a secondary education, who specializes in pottery making; the tale of Tacamba was told by Fidelia Perez, a full-blooded Tarascan woman with no formal education, in the pueblo of San Gerónimo on the northern shore of Lake Pátzcuaro; the legend of Lake Cuitzeo was a collective effort by several natives

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of the town of Cuitzeo; the other stories were told by Manuel Valenzuela, a former guide around Tzintzuntzan, in his uniquely exciting, urbane style.

Told and retold for generations in their native tongue, these tales were rendered orally in the Spanish of the region and translated into English by the author.

The stories have a continuity dating back to the sixteenth century (Ruiz, 1940). The exact phraseology varies with the individual

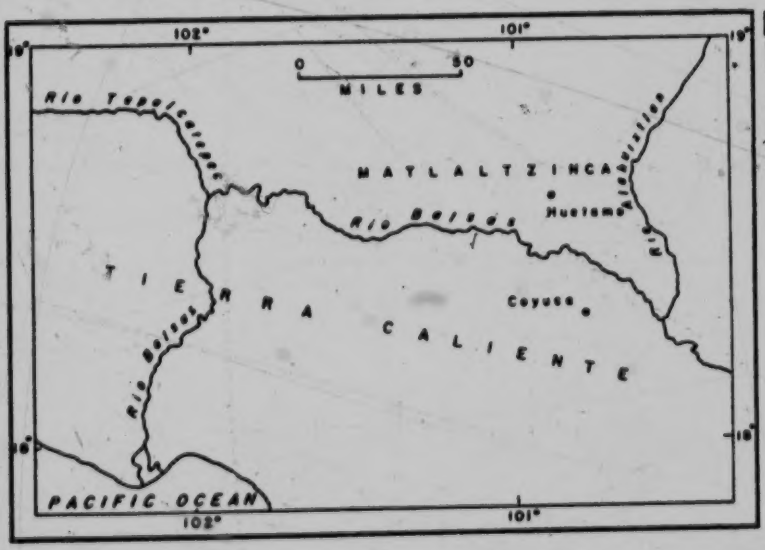

Fig. 2. Map of the Tierra Caliente of Michoacán

narrator, and his rendition usually conforms to the peculiar orientation given by his native pueblo. Some of these legends were published in Spanish by Ruiz in 1940, but this presentation represents their first appearance in English. The Ruiz versions are more elaborate than those presented herein and thereby form an interesting comparison.

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THE LEGENDS

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[128] [173] [167] The eight Tarascan legends have been arranged in their presumed historical sequence. The creation myth is followed by a legendary account of tribal wanderings until the beautiful and abundant land, Michoacán, was reached.

[175] Next are four love stories explaining natural features of the countryside. The first of these belongs to the period of intertribal wars (1200-1400 A.D.) which eventually consolidated the empire. The second is a simple folk tale explaining the origin of an important spring. Rivalry between political and religious power may be perceived in the third. The fourth reflects palace intrigue and the problems of succession to the throne.

[648] The final two legends deal with the coming of the Spaniards. The first one prophesies their coming and the second presents a rationalization of the Conquest.

[128] The legends are preceded by short notes which place them in historical perspective.

THE BIRTH OF CUERÓHPERI

Historical Comment

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[175] The Tarascans, like other cultured peoples of Mexico and Central America, had knowledge of the calendar. In the *Relación de Michoacán*, a work written probably in 1540-41 by an anonymous Franciscan priest, the names of fourteen of the eighteen Tarascan months of twenty days each are mentioned, and for four of the months the corresponding date in the Christian calendar is given (Caso, 1943).

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292 At the fiesta of *Uazcata cónscuaro* (on June 27,) the chief priest, dressed in full pompous regalia, related the history of the nation and its princes.

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nation and its princes. This account forms the principal part of the *Relación* and refers to the marvels of creation performed by their god, Curicaueri. The miracles of the creation are told in the countryside between Lake Pátzcuaro and Lake Cuitzeo as the tale of the birth of Cueróhperi.

The Legend

In the beginning of time there was no light. The silent dwelling place of Curicaueri, the only god at that time, was full of minute (atómica) material which slowly moved around without any order or harmony. Curicaueri realized that his enormous circular eyes could not penetrate the darkness nor contemplate infinity; therefore he created four orbs of light, each burning in one of the cardinal points of the universe, and light existed.

Great shapeless masses from the depths now were reflected in the eyes of the powerful god. From some of the mass, Curicaueri created Huriata, the sun god, naming him father and overseer of the universe. Then Huriata formed the heavenly bodies, ordering that they light the heavens in their own manner.

Thus day and night came into the world.

Through his golden mask Curicaueri smiled upon seeing the light of the four orbs, and, viewing the orderliness which Huriata had given to the universe, he desired to reward Huriata. Thus he created the moon goddess, Cutzi, and presented her to Huriata to take as his wife.

The contact of the two — Father Sun and the Mother Moon — brought darkness to the cosmos. From the two joined bodies, three rays of light broke forth upon the firmament to form three concentric circles around the dusky body of Cutzi.

From the three circles was born Cueróhperi (the creative principle or Mother Nature), the daughter whom Father Sun endowed with beauty and wisdom.

The three rays of light were extended through space, and they caused colors to be reflected from the heavenly bodies and the organized atoms.

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Curicaueri had created light; Cutzi and Huriata created harmony.

Curicaueri heard the hymn which the heavenly bodies intoned in their course through the sky. In addition, the slow, rhythmic beats of the atoms added to his conviction that his work was perfect. Retiring to his dwelling place amidst the four orbs, he sat upon his crossed legs and assumed a contemplative attitude. From this vantage point he beheld Cueróhperi, and, upon seeing how beautiful she was, he launched from his eyes four beams of light which shielded her from the sight of the world. One beam rested upon Cueróhperi's forehead, another upon her heart, another upon her hands, and the last upon her womb.

The daughter of Huriata felt herself pregnant. Below on earth, amidst the crashing of a furious tempest, she gave birth to the mountains, the seas, the lakes, the trees, and the flowers. Father Huriata and Mother Cutzi carefully attended Cueróhperi throughout her ordeal and afterwards maintained the closest vigilance over her, he by day and she by night. The gift of fertility which Curicaueri had given Cueróhperi made her always encumbered with the responsibility of deliverance.

Next she gave birth to the animals of the earth. Then came mankind, to whom she gave wisdom and the name of Purépecha.

The wisdom of the Purépecha was so great that they immediately began to govern the land with a knowing hand, cultivating and populating it in every direction. They created art and brought forth musical tones on magnificent instruments, such as the sweet-sounding ocarina and the sonorous *quiringua*. They painted with the colored plumes of birds, and they worked with stones to construct their dwelling place.

Very soon these men learned of their origin and displayed their gratitude to the gods by making sumptuous altars where they could worship the images of their gods. Curicaueri was represented as seated, with eyes and ears of the finest polished gold. They wished to denote that, in addition to being invisible, he had large eyes and ears in order to see and hear the sufferings of mankind. Besides this deity, the only things capable of seeing human beings

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were the four orbs residing in the heavens.

Huriata daily glittered in the sky, but the Purépecha represented him symbolically with three concentric circles which signified his union with the moon at the moment they created Cueróhperi. The lovely daughter of wisdom, Cueróhperi, was represented as standing nude with her long hair gathered in the form of a crown, with her hands resting beneath her breasts offering perpetual nourishment, and with her womb always ready to give forth fruit. In her they saw nature, to whose immutable laws all things are obedient.

Dance of the Viejitos

Related to the above legend is the still famous Dance of the Viejitos (little old men). It has its origins in the ancient past, but how old it is no one knows. Such a dance existed before the days of the Conquest, and the influence of the legend of creation is discernible in it.

The dancers of the Tarascan villages around Lake Pátzcuaro (Fig. 1) carry heavy staffs with an animal's head carved on the handle. They wear white cotton trousers, tunics with red sashes tied at the side, wide-brimmed hats with low crowns, and painted wooden masks depicting old faces.

The musician directs the dancing *viejitos*, usually youths, who dance collectively and individually, each trying to outdo the other in steps and clowning. In one of their serious figures, called "the cross of the four stars," the dancers form four files, each pointing in one of the cardinal directions. The four stars presumably represent the four orbs within which was the abode of Curicaueri.

In the little village of Petamba, sometimes as many as forty *viejitos* take part. One dancer wears a mask of a pretty white face, symbolic of Cutzi, the moon goddess (Locke, 1956, p. 372, illustrates this mask). The dancers form two files and each one dances with the woman wearing the white mask; then they form a great circle around her; next, in pairs, they pay reverential respect to

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her and perform a special dance. The circle, the reverential respect, and the dance are repeated until the participants grow weary.

The Dance of the Viejitos is performed chiefly during the religious fiestas of December, especially in the town of Pátzcuaro, a short distance from the old imperial village of Tzintzuntzan (Fig. 1).

JUST AS THE BIRDS

Historical Comment

With their capital at Tzintzuntzan (Place of the Hummingbird), the vast Tarascan empire extended beyond the boundaries of the modern state of Michoacán and, next to the Aztec empire, was the largest political unit in Mexico. In spite of several accounts by early Spanish friars (Basalenque, 1886; Beaumont, 1932; Escobar, 1924; Mendieta, 1870; Rea, 1882), perhaps less is known about the origin and historical antecedents of the Tarascans than of any other major Mexican group.

Traditional Mexican hypotheses derive them from the northwest, suggesting close affinity to Nahuatl peoples. Philologically, this theory does not hold up; the Tarascan language has no family connection with other Mexican idioms and must be classified as an independent, isolated family (Mason, 1940). Recent archaeological work (Brand, 1944, Goggin, 1943, p. 57; Osborne, 1943) indicates a more southeasterly origin, possibly from the Mixteca of Oaxaca and Guerrero either down the east arm of the Balsas River valley or along the Pacific Coast and thence northward up the Balsas, Tepalcatepec, and Marqués rivers into central Michoacán (Fig. 2).

The Tarascans have never indulged in scholarly hypotheses. For them the answer to their early origins and travels unfolds in the legend of the birds. This legend supports the theory of a southern origin.

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The Legend

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After traveling for many years, centuries perhaps, the Purépecha arrived at the banks of Lake Pátzcuaro. During their lengthy migration those who had departed from the land of their origin as small children grew into manhood; the virile men grew old; and the old ones fell to the earth like trees before the tempestuous hurricane.

Sons of the sons of the original emigrants were those who finally beheld the blue sky and green mountains reflected in the crystal ripples of the lake.

Around the campfire the forefathers traditionally related that far behind lay the land which was lighted at night by the four mysterious orbs, or stars. In their travels the Purépecha had journeyed near the mountains which vomited fire, where Father Huriata had his abode. Next they had passed through dense woods and stayed for awhile in the region where the two oceans were visible – one ocean giving birth to light and the other engendering the shades of darkness. Upon their departure they circled the destroyed cities of Copán and Quirigua in the ancient empire of the Maya and passed the sacred city of Mictlan. From this point they crossed the waters of Tzacatollan upon rafts of hewn logs and, after walking for many moons, finally arrived in a fertile land. The mild climate, fragrant air, and richness of the fruit tempted them to remain here forever.

After traveling for many years, centuries, perhaps, the Purépecha had learned many things from the various peoples who had given them shelter and hunting privileges within their dominions.

From the remote villages the Purépecha learned about the course of the heavenly bodies and the change of the seasons. Also they were taught how to work in stone, to mold clay, to cook venison over a fire, and to weave the fibers of plants. Above all else they worshipped the goddess Cueróhperi, who created all earthly things, and Huriata, who cared for them by day, and Cutzi, who watched over them by night.

When they arrived before Lake Pátzcuaro, they beheld with

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539 amazement this marvelous spectacle of blue. The people roamed
173 about briefly before choosing Tarerio as the site for their village. Fish and game abounded here in quantities beyond imagination.

The Purépecha were happy; but one morning Guaricaten, cacique of the island of Jarácuaro and lord of all the land in the region, arrived in Tarerio demanding to see the leader of the Purépecha.

To the venerable Cuiniurin he spoke: "Cuiniurin, since you are the eldest and the tribes obey your orders, I am speaking to you. For many moons I have permitted you and your people to rest here, recuperating from the rigors of the long journey from the hot lands of the south, whence you came. No longer can you remain here. Your race is prolific, and very soon the land which you people now occupy will not be sufficient. My own people now need this land. Leave with your belongings for the lands which are not as yet occupied."

With these words Guaricaten finished speaking and departed with his retinue, returning by canoe to the island of Jarácuaro. Cuiniurin immediately called together all his people and ordered the priest Petamuti to tell everyone assembled what was the will of their god Curicaueri.

When Petamuti rose to speak, the people anxiously leaned forward to hear his words. Suddenly all assembled saw a flock of swallows draw near. Hovering above the birds was a hawk which pursued them. The frightened birds sought refuge by alighting among the closely gathered people, and a warrior shot an arrow at the rapacious hawk. The arrow squarely struck the swooping bird, which fell dying to the ground. The swallows simultaneously arose in flight toward the four cardinal directions.

Petamuti spoke: "My chief, just as the birds so too is our destiny. Since birth we have traveled and worked, and a superior force, a supreme destiny, will conquer our enemies. Again we Purépecha shall move. Let us follow the path marked by the flight of the swallows, and where we find them singing we shall work and live happily."

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The following day Cuiniurin divided all his people into four tribes. One circled the lake eastward to the bank opposite Jarácuaro and founded Tzintzuntzan. Another tribe headed southward into La Sierra, settling in Tingambato. The third tribe traveled northward, stopping upon the rocky hill of Zacapu. The other sought refuge in the west at the headwaters of a river and called the site Carapan. 539 173

Thus it was that the four tribes, who came from the region brightened at night by the four lights of the Southern Cross, settled in the four cardinal points of Michoacán: in Tzintzuntzan, Tingambato, Zacapu, and Carapan (Fig. 1). The Purépecha built their homes of dried clay and lived like the swallows, singing and working. Valiantly they defended their land against those who questioned their right of possession. Father Huriata was with them.

On certain nights, in conformity with their sacred rites, they prepared four burning piles of wood pointing toward the four cardinal points in honor of Curicaueri. They danced and sang in joy; never was it the custom to become inebriated. Early the following day all the women would take some water and pitch it afar; the men would dispatch arrows into the sky; all the children would hurl stones through the air. Through such symbolical actions they demonstrated how they took possession of, and defended, their land against those who disputed their right of ownership.

Since then the Purépecha have possessed the land of Michoacán. They fought first with the neighboring races until, one by one, all were conquered or allied with them. Most of the credit for this has been attributed to the great Purépecha people.

Later they fought the Tecos in the west, the Huachichiles and Chichimecos in the north, and finally the Aztecs who came from the east. In all their battles they were victorious.

Their government was patriarchal; their religion remained simple and poetic; their occupations were fishing and handicrafts, the latter laboriously and beautifully executed. They were a people gentle in peace and brave in battle.

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THE LEGEND OF LAKE CUITZEO

Historical Comment

539 On the main highway leading northwest from Mexico City to
131 Guadalajara, an arterial road leads off to the north at Morelia and
103 passes by Lake Cuitzeo and the pueblo of the same name (Fig. 1).
133 Like all Mexican lakes, Cuitzeo is annually shrinking in size.
823 Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the tiny pueblo will gladly tell you the story of their once-proud lake which formerly resembled a heart.

539 This story belongs to a period of instability and planned war-
175 fare between the late twelfth and early fourteenth centuries. Spies
648 were sent into the lands of the snake-Chichimecs, located east of
721 Lake Pátzcuaro at Curínguaro, to learn the paths, river crossings,
726 and other data essential to a successful compaign. Warriors went to battle with wreaths of flowers and plumes of eagle feathers on their heads. The lord in command would set out with a war party made up of columns of warriors. This traditional method of journeying to battle appears in the Cuitzeo legend.

The Legend

539 Under the protective rays of the Southern Cross, those divine
823 guiding stars, Cueróhperi created a garden. The goddess created crystalline rivers in the countryside of Guayangareo and placed the faithful Mount Manuma as the guardian over the region.

In this garden the princess Hapunda lived as a recluse by order of her father. Each morning Father Huriata's first rays of light gently awakened her with a kiss on the forehead. She was so lovely that her subjects called her "Tzinziquin." Always sad and melancholy, her tears flowed as profusely as the waters of the springs forming the rushing river which fell over the nearby cliffs and crashed against the rocks blocking the pathway into the lower valley. The relentless waters penetrated the rock, but the tears of Hapunda did not move the hearts of the gods, and she vainly

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pined for the speedy return of her beloved warrior who had accompanied the king on his path of conquest.

Finally, one morning as Father Huriata's splendrous rays appeared over the mountain, hundreds of warriors filed across the vast plains of Cuaracurío. The commotion of the warriors drove to flight a beautiful hummingbird, which disappeared in the distance with the swiftness of an arrow. The princess, who had often fed the bird from her hand, watched disconsolately as it became lost from view.

Quickly she ran to greet the troops, anxiously questioning them concerning her beloved warrior. In the faces of the Tarascan fighters she beheld sadness and compassion. Trembling with fear, she fell on her knees in the path of the king.

"My father," she said, "return to me my beloved warrior who entered your service and left on this campaign. With your permission, my eyes will behold him as the vanquisher of our enemies."

The king made a gesture with his hand. The warriors fell into silence in order that all could hear the voice of their leader.

"My daughter Hapunda, beautiful 'Tzinziquin,' an arrow of the barbarous Chichimecs struck him while he stood in the midst of my warriors. Our god, Father Huriata, wanted his blood and I have deposited his heart in a box at the god's feet in the temple."

A low, audible moan came from the princess. With her eyes rolling wildly, she ran to the temple where the impressive golden disk of the god gleamed from its setting in precious wood. The grave, dignified priests were unable to restrain the impetuous Hapunda as she seized the box containing the heart of her lover and fled into the depths of the valley below. There, among the tall flowers, she concealed herself while directing her demented eyes first in one direction and then another, seeking a place to hide the box and its remains. Her insensible ears could not hear the voice of her father who futilely called and called and called.

The sun set beneath the hills and the moon passed beneath a cloud. All was dark and Hapunda remained silent. Finally, from her grief-stricken eyes emerged rivers of tears which inundated the valley.

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539 823 At daybreak the astonished king and warriors beheld, instead of a flourishing valley, a lake whose waters formed the shape of a heart.

These things occurred many years ago, but each morning Father Huriata continues to kiss with his first rays of light the crystal-clear waters created by Princess Hapunda, the beautiful "Tzinzi-quin."

QUIRITZÍCUARO (THE GREAT FOUNTAIN)

Historical Comment

312 [539] [361] The legend of Quiritzícuaro refers to one of the most significant factors in the life of the Tarascans—a needed spring to furnish a constant supply of fresh water. Almost every town in Michoacán is located beside a lake or is near a spring. While the territory to the north and to the south of La Sierra abounds in springs, their scarcity in La Sierra itself has always been a problem. In pre-Conquest times, many towns supplemented the flow from the local spring by constructing aqueducts of hollowed half-logs to bring in water from springs some distance away. This method is still used in many of the pueblos of La Sierra.

312 584 [178] The discovery of a new spring has been charmingly linked with a tradition existing for centuries in the highland pueblos of La Sierra, where the young people carry on their limited courtship while walking to and from the water fountain. The maiden loiters and gazes across the fields, never facing her suitor directly, and listens as he talks to her. His presence on the road to the fountain, although understood by the townspeople and usually prearranged with the girl, must give the appearance of being quite accidental.

361 49 [539] The pueblo of Paracho, referred to in the legend, is one of three significant Tarascan villages on the road that leaves the main highway at Carapan and winds southward for forty-five miles through pine and oak woods and small cultivated valleys to Uruapan (Fig. 1). Paracho is still primitively picturesque. The town's

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ancient art of guitar making has aided in the preservation of folk songs and possibly folk tales.

The Legend

The pretty Tzintzin, the modest and genteel priestess of the sun, unwittingly tantalized the young Tarascan warriors with her deep red lips and brilliant black eyes. As was her custom, she went out one day with her empty jar on her shoulder to obtain some water from the fountain.

The Tarascan region was famed for its beautiful young maidens. However, among handsome young men it was the mention of Tzintzin's name that inspired the most ardent emotions, wild desires, and impossible aspirations – impossible because her heart already had been given to a young huntsman. The fortunate youth was the elegant Quanicoti, the best hunter and warrior in the kingdom. He wore the most beautiful skins and feathers in Paracho.

The souls of the young priestess and hunter were united in love as pure as the fragrance of flowers, as clean as the breath of spring. However, their devotion was as impetuous as the rushing waterfall in the Tzaráracua stream, falling in multicolored ribbons as in homage to the gods.

That afternoon as Tzintzin walked through the forest, her lover awaited to offer her the prettiest flower in the meadow and to help her carry the water home. Upon sighting one another, the eternal dialogue of love, the same in all ages and all languages, began its course.

As usual, time passed rapidly without the two lovers noting the lowering of Father Sun in his course through the sky. Always such tardiness evoked reproaches from Tzintzin's venerable parents. This afternoon the lovers were so engrossed in words of love that Father Sun approached the horizon and hid behind a rose-colored cloud. Gently the song of the nightingale fell upon the ears of the happy couple. Tzintzin gazed lovingly upon her lover as he left her.

Suddenly, in anguish, Tzintzin realized that the time had

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539 312 passed and she had not gone to the fountain and filled her empty jug with water. She fell to her knees and directed her gaze at the rose-rimmed cloud hiding Father Sun. Tearfully, she prayed that the god would enable her to discover water nearby, so as not to incur the anger of her parents.

Her supplication was humble and sincere, because Tzintzin was a good girl. While she remained on her knees, a small beautifully colored bird arose from the center of a cluster of flowers. At that instant the last rays of Father Sun broke through the cloud and revealed drops of water which shone like diamonds falling from the feathers of the rising bird. This was the sign Tzintzin sought.

She parted the flowers and gazed into the pure, clear depths of a beautiful and hitherto unknown spring. Filling her jar, she returned home. Her parents were greatly surprised to see her return so quickly [she actually was late but the narrator said "so quickly" to emphasize the nearness of the new spring] and they supposed that Quanicoti had aided her with the water jar. However, she explained that she had discovered a new fountain of water near the road where her people traveled for decades.

The news of the fountain spread. The people from neighboring villages came to see the new source of water. Its depth was such that they called it Quiritzícuaro (the great fountain), and it still exists today to the east of the village of Paracho.

Always when the pretty Tzintzin visited this spot to hear Quanicoti's protestations of love, Father Sun smiled approvingly upon them with his brilliant, profound eye.

HUANITA

Historical Comment

173 174 [648] In "Just as the Birds," the narrator spoke of one group of Tarascans who travelled northward to settle upon the rocky hill of Zacapu. At some uncertain time in the twelfth century, these Tarascans conquered the people of Naranjo and then moved south-

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east over the mountains into the Lake Pátzcuaro region, stopping at the base of the Cerro (hill) de Guayameo (Fig. 1). Unsettled conditions lasted for probably two hundred years until the Zacapu Tarascans, under Chief Tariácuri, established their supremacy in the region.

Tariácuri is considered the father of the Tarascan empire. Apparently, he lived during the last years of the fourteenth century, since, according to Tarascan count, his reign ended in the Christian year of 1400 A.D. After Tariácuri's death, the kingdom was temporarily divided before it fell to his nephew Tangáxhuan.

The narrator of the following legend erred in referring to Tangáxhuan as Tariácuri's son; rather he was the son of Aramen, Tariácuri's brother. The factual basis of the love story of Tangáxhuan and Huanita lies in that twilight realm where fact and fantasy are difficult to separate. If true, its facts date from the early fifteenth century.

The Legend

Throughout the land of the Tarascans it is still said that on the evenings of *Cutzi-huiripen* (the full moon), as the winds gently move through the birch trees and pass over the flower-covered hillsides, a song may be heard which recalls to the listeners the memory of the charming Huanita.

Huanita was the daughter of the woods, the beloved favorite of Cueróhperi (Mother Nature). The reeds of the lake were less graceful in movement than she; her perfectly molded figure was more beautiful than any flower of the field; and the long silken hair which spread over her voluptuous shoulders exuded a sweeter fragrance than the aromatic *ocote* tree.

Tangáxhuan, son of the powerful Tarascan king Tariácuri, loved Huanita. However, the beautiful daughter of the forest, who also adored the prince, could not disclose her love for him nor weave the threads of his robe because of her special destiny. She had been ordered by the priests of Tariácuri to burn incense in the temple of the gods and not to listen to the words of any lover.

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From among the Tarascan maidens she had been chosen as the Huriat-pari, the consecrated virgin of the sun god, to carry the standard of the sun for her tribe. As the Huriat-pari, she was forbidden to be the wife of any man.

But Tangáxhuan dared to arouse the anger of the gods. He spoke to Huanita of his undying love for her. She listened and was won. Eventually, though, the anger of the gods was to descend upon them.

Tangáxhuan and Huanita believed that they were living alone and unwatched in the birch forest, but the sacrilegious priest Candó knew of their hiding place. Then one day the prince left to fight at the side of his father, Tariácuri, in defense of Pátzcuaro.

By this time Candó no longer carried out his priestly duties before the altar of the temple of Cueróhperi, nor did he worship at the temple of Tacup-achá (another name for Curicaueri). Instead, he secretly burned rich incense before the image of the false god Cuenomen.

Taking advantage of the absence of Tangáxhuan, Candó kidnapped the unsuspecting Huanita. The terrified girl pleaded tearfully but in vain with the enamored priest. He carried her far away. They passed through Carapan, then Tzirapu, eventually reaching the beautiful, rustic place called Taninitzicuaro (Tangancicuaro) where three springs arose from the earth. He left Huanita in the care of one of the high priests of Xhacúnan (Jacona), the second capital of the Tequecha people. [These villages are a few miles south and southeast of Zamora (Fig. 1).]

Many suns passed. Hundreds of emissaries were sent out by Tangáxhuan in search of Huanita upon the termination of the war. From village to village they vainly sought for information concerning the daughter of the forest. Equally fruitless was the aromatic incense offered to Cueróhperi. The angry gods would not be placated.

The searchers were in Cuérecan, Jacona, Paxácuaran, Pajacuarán, Xhacunan, [villages between Zamora and Patamban.]

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and even Patamban, but vainly they fought against destiny. No one had seen Huanita. The diligent emissaries were defeated in their search. They returned home carrying branches of *parietarias* as a symbol of lamentation and sacrificed them on the altar of Cueróhperi.

One morning, at sunrise, Huanita obtained permission from the high priest to go to the springs of Camécuaro. In this shaded sanctuary the unhappy girl went to disclose her grief to the gods, beseeching Cueróhperi to return her to Tangáxhuan. She wept and her tears fell into the waters of the deepest spring of Camécuaro, where they were instantly changed into silvery pearls; at the same time her sighs of longing went to dwell among the swaying branches of the forest, forming a sad and mysterious lullaby.

Suddenly, from the underbrush, the odious Candó appeared. Upon seeing him, Huanita quickly arose, and, with her long black hair flying in the wind, she furiously hurled herself upon the malevolent priest. But he overcame her and dragged her to the base of a birch tree, whose leaves were just beginning to reflect the golden rays of the rising sun.

Huanita, exhausted but with angry eyes, was on the verge of succumbing. Candó confidently smiled and put aside his robe. He was preparing to force himself upon his victim, but a strange hum broke through the woods. An arrow sped across the clearing, passed through the body of the wicked priest, and lodged itself at the base of the tree. Instantly, warm, blue water gushed forth at the spot where the arrow punctured the tree trunk.

The arrow had been shot from the bow of Tangáxhuan, who had followed the footsteps of the traitor.

The sun had fully arisen in the east; the bell-flowers, the heliotropes, and the stars-of-the-field had now opened their fragrant petals. The silence was accentuated even more by the soft murmuring of the trickling water. The stillness was interrupted only by the last tremors of the dying body in the withered leaves and by a couple who walked arm in arm singing a prayer of love.

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SESIHÁNGARI

Historical Comment

175 642 643 [539] [776] [794] By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Tarascan kingdom extended into the present states of Jalisco, Colima, and Guerrero, and thereby reached its greatest limits of expansion. King Zuangua (called Singuangua in the following legend of Sesihángari) ruled over this vast area not only as the highest political authority but also as the representative and incarnation of the primordial god Curicaueri. Thus he had the twofold responsibility of ruling the country and maintaining the cult of the god.

175 644 539 [782] In respect to this latter duty, the king had a woman known as the *quataperi* who supervised all the women of the royal household, including the group comprised of daughters of important men of the empire. These women passed their days preparing items to be used as offerings to the god and were permitted to leave the royal enclosure only at the time of fiestas.

173 539 644 648 [669] The story of one of these young women is a Tarascan tradition that was carefully and secretly transmitted from generation to generation, never being disclosed to outsiders until the wars of revolution in the early nineteenth century. At that time it became known when the Indians openly applauded the noble virtues displayed by Sesihángari in the face of adversity. As thousands of their countrymen fell into more desperate circumstances, this legend was popularized. Sesihángari's acceptance of death for that which she held dear in the face of evil oppression became a staunch subject of reference for the nineteenth-century Indian revolutionaries.

The Legend

539 644 173 Sesihángari, the strikingly beautiful daughter of the cacique of Patamban, was brought to the Purépecha court. Upon her arrival in the royal city of Tzintzuntzan, the ladies of the court crowned her with flowers on the steps of the palace and dressed her in a

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white robe lined with beautiful colors.

The ancient king Singuangua, upon beholding her, was dazzled with her youthful beauty. Realizing that it would be unjust to marry her because of his advanced age, the compassionate monarch paternally consecrated her as priestess of the Sun. She was housed in the *guandaperata*, the sacred mansion of the *guananchecha* (vestal virgins) of the cult of Tucupa-acha.

The princess Sesihángari, respecting the Purépecha traditions, graciously accepted the honor which King Singuangua bestowed upon her. Her humility only accentuated her loveliness. She only requested that she be permitted to continue her customary baths in the marvelous medicinal springs found in her father's territory. This the monarch granted with pleasure, appointing a group of the vestals to accompany her. To his surprise the waters seemed to work a miracle among the vestals, for in a short time they returned to court flowing with loveliness.

Intrigued by the phenomenon which converted the vestals into gems of magnificent beauty, the king ordered an investigation to determine the cause of the miraculous transformation. His wise men reported that the change could be traced to the magic power of the sulphureous mud from the enchanted marsh, situated eastward in the mountainous country near Taximaroa (Fig. 1). The boiling waters found there, they said, proceeded from the center of the earth and still contained their divine power.

Prince Tanimaranscua, one of the sons of King Singuangua, and Sesihángari fell deeply in love with one another. The king not only approved of their courtship but silently hoped they would marry. According to custom, a Purépecha priestess could marry only with the king's permission.

Prince Tzimtzicha, who was next in succession to inherit the throne, also loved Sesihángari and was jealous of his younger brother Tanimaranscua.

At length the old king died. His son Tzimtzicha succeeded him, and, according to custom, he took as his wives those of the preceding monarch. However, Tzimtzicha wanted Sesihángari as his wife.

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539 644 173 Fearing his brothers, especially Tanimaranscua, he gave orders that they be killed and the deed was done. The bodies of the murdered princes were still warm when the grief-stricken Sesihángari, with her hair flying in wild disorder, hurriedly took a torch and set fire to the palace where the bodies lay. Tongues of fire darted about and covered the regal mansion. The ceiling gave way, permitting the black smoke to rise heavenward and thereby making the sinister spectacle more awesome.

Among the leaping flames the onlookers saw Sesihángari embracing the body of her beloved Tanimaranscua. Before the horrified eyes of all, their two bodies were consumed in the flames. Thus were the two unified souls released in love and carried heavenward.

For centuries the Purépecha people remembered the terrible sight of the beautiful, grief-stricken princess.

THE DIVINE INCHÁTIRO

Historical Comment

173 539 787 [171] The folklore of the Indians of Mexico and Central America in pre-Conquest times referred to unusual omens—comets, burning temples, and dreams—which warned of the arrival of a strange people. The Tarascans were not exceptional in this respect [643] (Ramirez, 1903, pp. 11-12). King Zuangua at the nerve center of [631] the empire in Tzintzuntzan and his vassal princes at Tingambato, [645] Coyucán, and elsewhere were sitting in their political offices, fearful lest the sands of time were running out for the Tarascans.

173 539 [487] In the legend of Inchátiro those uneasy times are brought back like a breath of the past. Tingambato, the home of Camachuén, was, and still is, an important stopping point on a trail leading from La Sierra southeast to the Tierra Caliente (Fig. 1).

175 539 648 Since the time of Tariácuri at the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Tarascans and Aztecs fought over the Tierra Caliente (Fig. 2).[1] The Matlaltzincas, sometimes called Pirindas, were said to have aided the Tarascans against the Aztecs. For this assis-

1 [See Category 116, P. 5 -- Analyst]

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tance the Malaltzincas were granted a large area between Tacámbaro and Huetamo. The word Huetamo itself is Matlaltzinca, and there is still a "Pirinda" barrio (ward) in the town (Osborne, 1943, p. 61).

Clearly discernible are elements of Spanish Catholic acculturation in the dream portion of the legend. Also evident is the philosophical rationalization of a conquered people who had to accept and adjust to alien rule for an indefinite time into the future.

The Legend

The first morning rays illuminated the sky over Tingambato. It was the month of *duari* in the year of *ocelotl*. Three small cloudlets had just finished bathing the corpulent *ocote* trees and the sighing pines with a light rainfall.

The yellow-like dust of this land was unfertile, whereas in days long past it had been the site of great forests and immense meadows covered with exuberant vegetation, wild and fruitful. Formerly the jaguar had stalked here among the undergrowth; the timid *cú* bird had rendered his monotonously doleful notes; and, above all, the hummingbird (Tzintzún), the divine bird of the Tarascans, had sung his gorgeous melodies as if in offering to the god Curicaueri.

The day was fresh and all of nature was awakening. Over in the distance, mountain tops were running in and out of the shadows, just as in a dream of long ago hope had run its path of illusions. Camachuén was dreaming of those faraway things of the spirit, of those faraway things of love, where love was losing to hopelessness.

Camachuén (the protected of the gods), king of Tingambato, was thoughtfully walking in his garden which was filled with trees and flowers. There had been no calamity concerning his people which could be bothering him, nor was he concerned with Irichacuara, king of Pátzcuaro, with whom he had fought in times past. Furthermore, both King Characu, king of the Matlatzincas

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(Pirindas), and the Tarascan Emperor Calzonzin were at peace with their powerful armies. Camachuén's preoccupation on this day was with something greater and more profound. Camachuén was thinking about the divine Inchátiro, Queen of Xicalán (which means "the grace of the gods").

He was terribly disturbed because the hour had come when the villages of his people would be destroyed and his gods thrown from the temples. His race, the race of the Purépecha—descendants of King Tariácuri—had defied time and distance, sea and enemies, to place their homes on the edge of the deep blue waters of Tzirahuén, where they had erected a monument in memory of King Tziragu. But now the time had arrived when his people would wander alone among the mountains like driven beasts, because the children of the Sun would come from the east to conquer his people, take away their lands, destroy their homes, and smash their gods.

What would happen to his divine Inchátiro? In vain he had visited the sanctuary of Tazcapu [Zacapu] and made offerings to the god Curicaueri. Many mornings at daybreak he had prostrated himself in the midst of the forest and begged for the protection of the god of the sky, but without results. Camachuén remained grief-stricken.

Three moons passed. The dry leaves fell from the tall pines and all of nature was entering into a sad sleep. At last the prophecy of Guiapara, the high priest of Tzintzuntzan, was to occur. At first Camachuén thought it would be better to order his people to take arms and defend themselves until death released them. But he relented and decided to comply with the will of the gods. In tearful anguish he thought of the misery, hunger, and slavery which the future generations of his people would have to undergo. Only the Father of the Indians could know how tormented he was.

Another gloomy day arrived and Camachuén had not seen his beloved Inchatiro. He took the road to Xicalán and arrived at the palace still sad and pensive, thinking of the destiny which the gods had reserved for his people.

"Why are you sad?" asked Inchátiro wonderingly. "What sin-

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ister grief afflicts you?"

The unhappy Camachuén replied, explaining to her that the gods had become angry with the people and were going to punish them. Above all, he feared for her. Then, unburdening his heart to her, he related the following dream which Curicaueri had revealed to him:

> I saw you reigning in your palace, divinely beautiful as always. Your gardens were covered with multi-colored flowers. All the people of Xicalán were paying tribute to you. The aroma of the fresh flowers and breezes from the fields passed through your balcony, caressing you. The gods, envious of your virtues, were watching your virginal heart, and they learned that you always thought of me ... and after that ... a shadow, black as night, covered my dream, and everything was horrible.
>
> The white men had arrived and invaded our villages and your palace. There, in your quarters, a stranger was living and you were caressing him, giving him your love and, finally, your heart. You had forgotten the oath taken before the altar of our gods. You had forgotten the hatred existing between our race and theirs. I did not raise my knife to kill the stranger, because the gods detained my hand, saying that such an act was not mine by right to do.
>
> And then my soul, wandering among the dark shadows of the night, wrote in letters of light upon your heart the phrase LOVE AND HOPE. Love and hope, that is the pathway of life which enables us to reach the abode of our gods. Love those who suffer, for they are our brothers; hope is their redemption. On the road of life must be planted our deepest sorrow in future hope.
>
> Remember that all have the right to live, and that a tenth of our good fortune must be shared with those who are hungry and needy.
>
> Remember that if you have bread, the poor do not have bread; that if you have good fortune, the

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poor have only pain and sorrow. The poor is our brother; the rich is our master. Love the poor; he is of our race. The rich is the foreigner; he pays us with sarcasm and jokes. Remember always that he who suffers and cries needs your help. These are the maxims of love.

THE LEGEND OF TACAMBA

Historical Comment

All the drainage of southwestern Michoacán is southward to the Balsas river, the heart of the tropical region. This area was in pre-Spanish times seemingly under Tarascan domain (Osborne, 1943). Coyucán, mentioned in the legend of Tacamba as being one of the seats of Tarascan power at the beginning of the sixteenth century, is probably the town of Coyuca, a scant thirty-five miles south of present Huetamo (Fig. 2). At the time of the Conquest it was still an area of dispute between the Tarascans and the Aztecs, although both sides were temporarily at peace.

The wars between the Tarascans and Aztecs over this area accounted in large part for the refusal of Siguangua and Tzimtzicha to lend Tarascan support to the Aztecs against the Spaniards, thereby enabling the conquistadores to defeat both empires separately.

Tacamba, like Camachuén of the preceding legend, was one of the vassal princes of the Tarascan empire under King Siguanga and Tzimtzicha, his successor, at the time of the coming of the Spaniards. The death of Siguangua is accurately preserved in the body of the legend. In the first year of the Spanish arrival on the borders of Michoacán, smallpox and dysentery brought by Spanish messengers struck the Tarascan capital killing the king and his chief priests. The epidemic continued to take a terrible toll among the native population, weakening the Tarascans for the Spanish Conquest.

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The Legend

Tacamba resided in one of the most colorful sites of the Tierra Caliente, that florid region which marks the descent of the sierra as it breaks away in a spectacular fashion toward the Pacific coast.

Tacamba, a descendant of the legendary Hirepan, was one of the four chieftains of the Michoacán alliance. His kingdom was the richest and most fertile of the four provinces comprising the Tzintzuntzan empire. His capital city of Coyucán, the city of the eagles, sat on the edge of the river that flowed through the luxuriant tropical growth to Zacatula.

The prince was a young man. His tall, willowy stature reminded one of the tropical plant whose name he bore. His countenance was calm and profound, like the brilliance of a star on a calm, clear night. He had spent his life in the tranquility of Coyucán and in the hostilities of the army. At times his life had been like the gentle winds which wove their course through the pines; on other occasions he had lived as violently as the hurricane which pushes aside the oak that falls in its invincible path.

Generous and magnanimous by nature, he did not enjoy war. Nevertheless, when the chief of the quadruple alliance sought his help, Tacamba was the most prudent in council and the most valiant in combat. In spite of the demands of the priests, he never caused a single captive to climb the stairs leading to the sacrificial altar.

During the epochs of peace, this prince taught his people how to improve upon their cultivation of the fertile land in the kingdom and how to advance the rudimentary hand industries which had begun throughout the land.

From time to time Tacamba moved his court to a small valley bearing his name. He had constructed a walled castle on the bluff overlooking the crystalline alberca of Chupio, famous for its nightly visit by the sirens who came by a secret canal from the ocean to sing.

This fortress, situated on the elevated heights, offered a splen-

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did view in every direction. To the north the peaks of the pine-covered mountains were lost among the clouds; on the south the outline of a strange, fantastic ridge loomed through the thick haze of the hot country; directly below the palace lay the primordial valley and the poetic lake.

Here Tacamba spent many of his days devoted to important matters of government, while at night he directed his gaze upward into celestial space where innumerable other worlds gave testimony to the immense power of the gods. Was it during such a moment as this that the coming of other men to enslave his people was revealed to him? Many evenings his subjects noted that their young monarch stood alone on the roof of his palace and sang sweet but melancholy songs to Tucupa-Ácha, the supreme ruler of the universe.

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When the rumor concerning the arrival of the Spaniards spread throughout the land, Tacamba listened without showing the least surprise. He sent emissaries to all corners of his realm, and one month later twenty thousand of his men were encamped near Chupio on the banks of the two rivers which bathed tropical Turicato. He knew that the proud Aztec king, Montezuma, had sought aid from the Tarascans and he desired to be the first to offer troops.

When the court at Tzintzuntzan chose to remain neutral, Tacamba's surprise and despair was beyond measure. Cautioning his troops to stay there, the prince hastened to the imperial city in hopes that he could overcome the apathy of the aged emperor with reason and logic.

The reigning monarch of the vast empire of Michoacán was King Siguangua, formerly bold and valorous but now old and weak in body and mind.

Tacamba used his eloquence in vain. Fruitlessly he appealed to religious sentiment, to love of the Tarascan countryside, to the pride of the formerly invincible race; finally he spoke of the fear and superstition which now held in bondage the souls of the Purépecha nobles.

Sometime later a smallpox epidemic spread its desolation among the families of the kingdom. The first of the victims to succumb

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to the disease was the Tarascan king, whose death added to the panic which had already seized the people.

Then Tzimtzicha ascended the throne once occupied by the powerful descendents of Tariácuri. At the same time the Spaniards were conquering the hitherto invincible Aztec city of Tenochtitlán. Unhappily, Tacamba watched the dissolution of that race which had always distinguished itself through its strength and courage. The race of eagles seemed like a band of timid doves quivering at the presence of a hawk.

Tacamba, however, like a faithful subject, united his destiny with that of his king. Later, when the disgraced monarch of Tzintzuntzan was a prisoner, Tacamba stayed at his side and lovingly carried the heavy chains which bound Tzimtzicha. He saw how the greed of the Conquistadores for gold drove them to torture the king, and he heard the courageous dying words of the martyred Tzimtzicha.

Tacamba could no longer contain himself. Vowing eternally to hate the invaders of his native land, he placed himself at the head of many warriors and began the short but mighty epoch of slaughter and extermination before the *encomienda* system was established in Michoacán by Hernando Cortez.

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DISCUSSION

539 Tarascan legends may be examined from many viewpoints, including those of history, ethnology, psychology, and literature. Probably the most important consideration is the basic function they fulfill for the Tarascans—a function so significant that the legends have survived to the present. Only a brief analysis of these factors can be made in this study.

539 173 174 [167] As orally transmitted history they leave much to be desired, but they contain usable references which support other data. While one may doubt that the Tarascans originated in South America, as suggested in "Just as the Birds," migration myths are fairly common in the folklore of Indians of the Americas. To some extent they probably indicate dim memories of tribal migrations.

539 796 782 [927] The reference in the legend of Lake Cuitzeo to the placing of the warrior's heart in the temple as an offering to the sun god, Huriata, is a reasonably accurate account of ceremonial usages. In early times the Tarascans made offerings of deer meat to their gods; later, human sacrifice was instituted. War prisoners were preferred, and one reason for war was to have sufficient victims. In any event, the presentation of the victim's heart was the choicest possible offering to Huriata.

539 [198] [193] Items of psychological interest include the need to explain natural features of the countryside, as shown in the story of Quiritzícuaro. The change of Candó from a good to a bad priest in the legend of Huanita may refer to defrocked clergymen of post-Conquest times, but most likely it refers to a period of temporary degeneration among the hereditary priestly class during the days of Chief Tariyaran some two hundred years before Conquest times.

539 175 648 In this same vein, the legend of Inchátiro shows the depressed psychic condition of these indigenous people as the result of the Conquest. The dream portion in the same legend reveals the nature

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The dream portion in the same legend reveals the nature of the Tarascan people's subsequent acceptance of the Conquest through the successful teachings of the Catholic church.

As literature, the legends are presented in language which seems remarkably artistic and urbane for the Tarascan's menial status and lack of education in modern Mexico. However, it should be remembered that from the beginning these stories had a direct religious association and the Petamuti undoubtedly demanded rather exact adherence to theoretical norms of oral literature by the neophyte who would succeed him as the bearer and guardian of folk tradition. The conditions of their annual telling at the fiesta of *Uaxcata cónscuaro* to the assembled tribe encouraged the priest to develop them into emotional, oral literature. Some of this pre-Conquest tendency has continued to the present time. Also, these legends have probably become embellished with illusions and atmospheric details by skilled narrators in historic times. This author-translator chose the most sophisticated and excitingly literary rendition available where a choice presented itself.

One of the most impressive facts about these legends, even to the non-analytical person, is the presentation of a "mood" and the changes in mood as the given story progresses. The narrator seems to live and to feel the story.

For some of these legends to have been preserved so well since the Spanish Conquest may reflect, to some extent, the relative isolation of Michoacán, but it seems more likely to indicate the importance these legends have had and still have in Tarascan life. In the present Tarascan area, nearly four hundred and fifty years of acculturation have obscured many traits of native provenience. Today's economic specialization and trade patterns are apparently based upon aboriginal conditions (West, 1948, p. 57), yet they are known to have been formalized by Europeans (Beals, 1946, p. 210). Nevertheless, the character of such things as marriage, family life, and the people's attitudes toward life's values—the real educative forces affecting the thinking and personality of Tarascans—appear to be relatively unchanged.

Despite the more recent modifications in material culture and social organization, the basic values woven into the early legends

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539 of the Tarascans still provide the primary index of behavior in the
809 pueblos of the lake, La Sierra, and La Cañada. The heroes and
577 heroines pictured in this oral literature continue to serve as ideal behavioral referents, thereby providing through emulation the key to local approbation and social prestige.

539 The telling and re-telling of these legends is one way the
193 Tarascans instruct their young people in societal cooperation and
867 thereby maintain their cultural unity. Thus the Tarascan is pro-
182 vided with part of the cultural knowledge necessary to play the role expected of the individual in his native cultural setting. Even a casual visitor may notice certain attitudes of mind which date back to Conquest and pre-Conquest times, thereby providing the basis for a fundamental unity which has defied time and change.

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[P. 35]

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[End Plate I]

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Plate I. Views of Tarascan Countryside

[115] *Upper*, looking towards village of Copula, home of Luis Espinosa, one of the narrators.

Lower, looking across Lake Pátzcuaro from top of island of Janitzio.

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[End Plate 2]

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Plate II. Tarascan Houses and Mode of Travel

[96] *Upper*, Tarascan homes, wooden fences are a recent innovation.
[103] *Lower*, Tarascans returning to mountains after selling firewood in
[438] Morelia.

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[End Plate 3]

Plate III. Views in Morelia

Upper, Ignacio Peña, narrator of the myth of creation, in front of author's apartment.
Lower, Spanish aqueduct built to bring water from mountains to city.

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[Following End Plate 3]

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